


# County finances stir arguing among reps

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Sullivan County's executive finance committee met for more than three hours Friday in a session scheduled to discuss putting a freeze on about \$800,000. Instead, members used the time to argue about a draft budget report.

 **Newport** Peter Franklin, D-Newport, ex-officio executive finance committee member, accused the current county administration of spending money that was not in the budget.

"Money was spent that was not appropriated," Franklin said. "We need to look at the current budget and see if money is being spent that is not appropriated."

As members of the committee scrutinized a draft version of county finances for the current fiscal year, Franklin demanded from commissioner Ethel Jarvis three detailed reports referencing the nursing situation at the nursing home.

"You've spent almost a half million dollars that was not in the budget," Franklin said.

Sue Gottling, D-Sunapee, agreed with Franklin's request for a report for the exact amount of money spent on registered nurses, licensed nursing practitioners and licensed nursing assistants for the first five months of the fiscal year.

"I think it is important to be broken out," Gottling said.

Committee chair Brenda Ferland, I-Charlestown, disagreed and when she was

attempting to have a discussion with Gottling, Franklin interrupted leading to a heated discussion.

"Excuse me, I'm trying to talk to Representative Gottling," Ferland said to Franklin.

Franklin also told Ferland that he has requested a nursing home census and has yet to receive it. He asked Ferland to get him a copy of the report.

"You can get it from the state," Ferland said.

Franklin said he did not want a state report and he and Ferland again began to argue until Jarvis said she would get the report for Franklin. By the end of the meeting, Franklin was given the report.

The committee also discussed the status of the budget in which \$6.8 million has been borrowed since March 16 to pay county salaries and other bills. According to a document the committee provided, the county has \$1.7 million left on its approved line of credit to sustain the county until \$10.3 million in property tax revenue is received Dec. 17.

"A huge portion of the tax money will be used to pay the loan," Gottling said.

Franklin questioned whether the amount left on the credit line will be enough to cover county expenses and Ferland assured him it would be.

But Franklin was not pleased with the amount borrowed so far.

"This is the first time we've ever borrowed more than \$5 million," Franklin said. "And we never

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spent the entire \$5 million."

The revenue and expense sheet for the first five months of the fiscal year indicate the county is running a \$4.4 million deficit, but Ferland said the numbers don't reflect the county's true financial status.

According to Ferland, the revenue and expense sheet for the end of December will reflect the influx of the \$10.3 million in property tax revenue offsetting the deficit.

"I think we're running about

even right now," Ferland said.

To avoid problems with next year's budget, Ferland said she is going to start the budget process in January, well before the county manager and county commission start budget talks.

"We are going to start our own budget," Ferland said.

Jarvis did not agree with Ferland's proposal and said she would check whether Ferland's move was legal.

"I'm going to get a legal

opinion on that," Jarvis said. "I just want the procedure to be correct."

The commission is scheduled to meet Tuesday, when Jarvis will discuss Ferland's proposal with the other commissioners and attempt to finalize the amount of funds to be frozen. The next full delegation meeting is scheduled Dec. 10.

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